



## What is chronic pain?

Your pain may be called chronic pain if it lasts longer than 3 to 6 months. It may also be called chronic pain when the pain:

- **Lasts at least 30 days longer than normal, after being sick or hurt.**
- **Is caused by an illness that does not go away.**
- **Keeps coming back for months or years.**

Chronic pain may come and go or it may be there all the time.

## How does it happen?

When you get hurt, sick or have a medical problem, it can change your nervous system. These changes cause the nerves to keep telling your brain there is pain, even though the injury or problem has healed. Sometimes the nerve changes mean you feel pain more easily or more strongly than you did before your injury or illness.

## How do I know I have chronic pain?

Your medical provider will need to see you. Your provider will ask about the history of the pain. Your provider may ask questions like these:

- **Where does it hurt and when does it hurt?**
- **How long does it hurt and how bad is it?**
- **Does the pain come and go, or is it there all the time?**
- **What kind of pain is it: sharp, dull, burning, stabbing or a feeling of pressure?**
- **What makes it better?**
- **What makes it worse?**

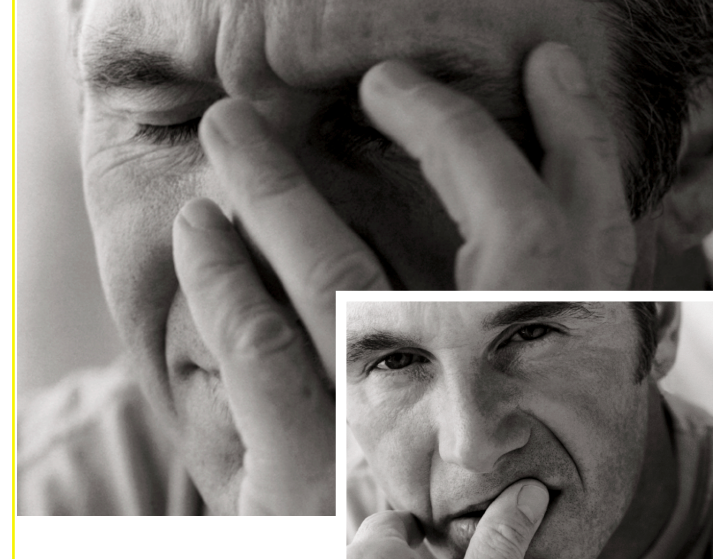
## How is chronic pain treated?

Your treatment depends on the kind of pain you have and how bad it is. There are many ways to help chronic pain. To get good pain control, you will probably need to use more than one way. Work with your doctor to find the treatments that will help you the most.

Medical treatments may include:

- **Pain medicine.**
- **Heat or cold.**
- **Help for anxiety or depression (these problems can make the pain worse).**
- **Physical therapy.**
- **Treatments such as massage, acupuncture, hypnosis, or biofeedback. Check first to see if these are covered by Medicaid.**

Your doctor may choose treatments that are covered by Medicaid. The treatment will probably include medicine to help with your pain. Follow your provider's instructions on



how to take all medicines. Be sure to keep all appointments with your provider for checks on how well your treatment is working.

## How long will the pain last?

Your treatment may not get rid of all of the pain. But it should allow you to enjoy life more than you could before treatment. The pain may gradually go away over many weeks or months.

## What can I do?

You have an important role in the treatment of your pain. What you do away from the doctor's office to help your pain can make a big difference. You can help your medical treatment work better.

### Things you can do to help your pain

- **Be active. Try to get some exercise daily.**
- **Do things to relax and reduce stress.**
- **Use positive self-talk like, "Yes I can!"**
- **Work as a partner with your doctor.**
- **Learn how to prevent and take care of pain flare-ups.**
- **Sleep well.**
- **Get out and have fun!**

## Learn to relax

Stress and tension can make your pain worse. Relaxation can help you reduce stress. There are special ways to relax. Examples of helpful ways to relax include deep breathing and meditation. Taking the time to relax every day can help you control your pain.

**Deep breathing**—Sit or stand with your hands on your stomach. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Feel your stomach push out. When you are ready to breathe out, first pucker your lips like you are about to whistle. Then breathe out slowly through your lips. In your mind, say the word "relax" as you breathe out. Imagine the stress leaving your body as you breathe out. Repeat 3-4 times. This can be done any time you feel tense!

**Meditation**—Sit down in a quiet room. Close your eyes. Breathe in and out slowly. Relax your muscles. Choose a word, phrase or short prayer to focus on. Breathe in slowly. When you breathe out, repeat the word or prayer. Do this for 10 or 20 minutes.

The Nurse First Program can help you learn what to do to help your pain.

## Call the Nurse First Program

at **1-800-???-????** anytime you are sick or hurt. The nurses are there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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# Understanding Chronic Pain

The Nurse First  
Chronic Pain Program from  
Montana Medicaid

